

Journal of the Royal Society of Arts

NO. 4985

FRIDAY, 31ST AUGUST, 1956

VOL. CIV

THE LIFE AND WORKS OF SIR JOSHUA REYNOLDS, P.R.A.

The Inaugural Fred Cook Memorial Lecture by
ALLAN GWYNNE-JONES, D.S.O., A.R.A.,
delivered to the Society on Wednesday, 8th February,
1956, with Professor Sir Albert Richardson,
K.C.V.O., President of the Royal Academy of Arts,
in the Chair

THE CHAIRMAN: This is a memorable day. We have met to listen to a lecture on the life and work of Sir Joshua Reynolds, who was elected to this Society some years before the Royal Academy was founded—actually the date was September, 1756, according to the records, and the amount of the subscription Two Guineas—a very strong recommendation to those who have inclinations to join the Society to-day, I am sure! And on this same day Benjamin Franklin, on whom we had a lecture on 18th January, was also elected to the Royal Society of Arts. The lecture to-day is part of the series which will be given under the Fred Cook Memorial Trust.

This Trust was founded in 1954 by the bequest of Mrs. Grace Cook in memory of her late husband, who died in 1950. It was Mrs. Cook's request that the income from the Trust should be used for paying the expenses incurred in the delivery of an annual lecture on the Old Masters. The late Mr. Fred Cook had been a Fellow of the Society for nearly thirty years. He was a lecturer on art in public and preparatory schools, and he lectured to literary and philosophical societies on the painters of Florence, Venice, Flanders, Holland, Great Britain and France.

Now it is not for the chairman to give the lecture, but it is his duty to give every encouragement to the lecturer, in this case a very distinguished portrait painter. I therefore have great pleasure in calling upon Mr. Allan Gwynne-Jones to deliver his lecture on Sir Joshua Reynolds.

The following lecture, which was illustrated with lantern slides, was then delivered:

THE LECTURE

Reynolds was born on 16th July, 1723, at Plympton, in Devonshire. His father, the Reverend Samuel Reynolds, was Headmaster of the Plympton

Grammar School, his mother was Theophila Potter. They were not rich, but on the other hand there is no evidence that the Reynolds family were ever prevented from doing, in a modest way, anything they wished through lack of money. There were possibly 12 (Northcott says 11) children, of whom only three sons and three daughters survived. Of the sons, one became a Lieutenant in the Navy, one an ironmonger in Exeter and the third, Joshua, almost without struggle, attained the foremost position in one of the most hazardous of professions.

Not much evidence of his early talent has come down to us: there is a drawing, now in the possession of the Royal Academy, of a wall pierced by a window, on which Samuel Reynolds has written: 'This is drawn by Joshua in school out of pure idleness', but he must have been more impressed by a later drawing of the colonnade of Plympton School, for under it he wrote, '... by observing the rules laid down in this book' (the *Jesuit's Perspective*), 'a man may do wonders; for this *is* wonderful'. Nevertheless, these drawings, although reasonably good, are not in any way remarkable. Only one painting has survived; it was done when he was 12 years old, with ships' colours on an old piece of sailcloth, and is a portrait of the Reverend Thomas Smart. This too, though it has a certain vigour, is not particularly outstanding. We are told that young Reynolds and his sisters were allowed to draw on the whitewashed walls of the passages with burned sticks; this has been interpreted by some writers as showing Reynolds' father's interest in art, by others as his wish to save the cost of pencils and paper—at any rate it appears that he must have been a kind and indulgent parent.

I am not going to say that Reynolds, if he had been left to himself, would not have become a painter—such a great natural talent could not for long have lain dormant—nevertheless it would appear that a very decisive event in his life was the chance that, while still a school-boy, Jonathan Richardson's *An Essay of the Theory of Painting* should have fallen into his hands. I quote one or two extracts from this book for it is extraordinary how much in the career of Reynolds seems to be related to this curious work; Richardson writes:

No nation under heaven so nearly resembles the Ancient Greeks and Romans as we. There is a haughty courage and elevation of thought, a greatness of taste and love of liberty, a simplicity of honesty amongst us which we inherit from our ancestors, and which belongs to us as Englishmen.

Then he goes on:

I will venture to pronounce as exceedingly probable that if ever the ancient great and beautiful taste in painting revives it will be in England, but not till English painters, conscious of the dignity of their country and of their profession, resolve to do honour to these by piety, virtue, magnanimity, benevolence and a contempt for everything that is really unworthy of them. And now I cannot forbear wishing,

—and I would underline the following:

that some younger painter than myself would practice the magnanimity I have recommended, in the single instance of attempting and hoping only to equal the greatest masters of whatsoever age or nation. What were they that we are not, or may not be?

This is very inflammatory matter—and there is much more of it—may it not have implanted in Reynolds the ambition to be that ‘younger painter’, and to endeavour to attain to that glory which Richardson with his explosive patriotism foretells?

Anyhow, at the age of 17 when he was given the choice between art and medicine, he said that rather than be an ‘ordinary’ painter he would prefer to be a country apothecary. The choice given him may seem a curious one to us who regard doctoring as a reasonably safe profession and being an artist as an extremely unsafe one. In the eighteenth century, however, there were no photographers and an artist who could get a reasonable likeness was much in demand and if in addition he could give to his sitters by some touch of art something of the look of gentlefolks he would probably do very well indeed. But what Reynolds’ answer implied was that, though he would rather be an apothecary than trained by some local face-painter, his choice would be otherwise if the road to a possible excellence was opened up to him.

Reynolds’ father seems to have at once understood this, and agreed that he should be apprenticed to Thomas Hudson, who was not only the most fashionable portrait painter of the time, but was in addition a Devonshire man. It is moreover a curious coincidence that Hudson should have been married to Jonathan Richardson’s daughter. All was quickly arranged and Reynolds was bound apprentice for four years and went to work with Hudson in London. The premium paid was £120. Hudson was a sound painter, at his best excellent, and if he is underestimated to-day it is in part because of his excessive use of copyists and ‘drapery men’, and far the greater number of pictures which bear his name were certainly not painted by him. Everything seemed to be going extremely well, when after two years Reynolds suddenly broke off his apprenticeship. The only direct account we have of this break is given by the diarist Farrington. That account suggests that it was a case of the jealousy of a master of a brilliant pupil. The story is that Hudson painted a head on a blank canvas and gave it to Reynolds to take round to the ‘drapery man’, Van Haaken, to have a background and clothes put to it—this was ordinary practice in those days and was done, though not so flagrantly, by Reynolds himself. It was late in the evening and pouring with rain, and Reynolds thought it would be more sensible to take it round first thing in the morning. At breakfast-time Hudson asked why the canvas had not been taken: Reynolds pleaded the rain. According to Farrington, Hudson then said: ‘You have not obeyed my orders, and you shall not stay in my house’. Anything so unreasonable as that is very hard to believe, and the evidence against it is not only that Hudson and Reynolds remained friends all their lives but a few days later Reynolds’ father, writing to Cutcliffe (the friend who had arranged the apprenticeship) says ‘. . . there is no controversy I was ever let into wherein I was so little offended with either party. . . . I bless God and Mr. Hudson, and you, for the extreme success that has attended Joshua hitherto’.

After the break with Hudson, Reynolds returned home and began his career as a portrait-painter. His charge then was about three guineas for a head and

shoulders, and soon he had plenty of sitters, indeed in five months he had painted twenty portraits! But in about 1744, that is to say, when Reynolds was 21, he went back to London again. The Devon gentry, particularly Lord Edgcumbe, his old friend Mr. Parker, and the Elliots, all used their influence on his behalf and sent their friends to him to be painted.

In 1746 his father fell ill and Reynolds returned to Plympton, and after his father's death at the end of the year he went to live with his unmarried sisters at Plymouth Docks. At this time the influence of Hudson is still strong, as can be seen from the portrait of his father (Figure 1). However, during the same year he painted the astonishing picture of Captain Hamilton (Figure 3) in Russian dress. It is hard to account for the sudden emergence of such a masterpiece; were the date not certain we should be tempted to think it painted *after* he had returned from Venice—for has it not much of the grandeur and swagger of the great Venetians—rather than six or seven years before. An interesting thing about this picture—and we know this from another picture of Captain Hamilton painted at the same time and also belonging to the Duke of Abercorn—is that Reynolds has *added* a moustache!

After his return to Devonshire and the death of his father, he made the acquaintance of a young man called Gandy. Gandy was not an artist of very great distinction but he was full of theories and he must have had great force of character. In the various accounts of Reynolds I have read Gandy remains a shadowy character but all seem to agree as to the great influence that he had on Reynolds—though such of his paintings as survive do not seem very remarkable.

One of Gandy's theories was that the surface of a picture ought to have a richness in its texture, as if its colours had been composed of cream or cheese. This theory, and his insistence on the importance of *chiaroscuro*, may well have opened Reynolds' eyes to the beauties which paint, in its own right, can possess. It is at any rate apparent that a picture like the self-portrait (Figure 2) now in the National Portrait Gallery, has a richness and 'fatness' of paint very unlike his earlier and more Hudsonesque pictures. Moreover, in many of his later pictures Reynolds deliberately laid on a paste of thick paint where he intended to place the head *before* he started modelling. This is described by Mason, who watched him at work, in his *Anecdotes of Sir Joshua Reynolds*—indeed sometimes in this respect he out-Gandied Gandy.

In 1749 Reynolds made one of those friendships which can have an extraordinary influence on a man's life. He was introduced to a young sailor, the Honble. Augustus Keppel, who was about his own age and had been put in charge of a Squadron with a mission to the Mediterranean. They took such a mutual liking to one another that Keppel asked Reynolds to go with him. With Keppel Reynolds saw many of the Mediterranean ports; he painted the officers of the garrisons, and he was with him at the famous interview with the Dey of Algiers when the Dey threatened Keppel with the bowstring and Keppel replied by going to the window and pointing to the British ships moored in the bay. At Minorca Reynolds fell from his horse and received the scar to his upper lip which can be seen in most of his later self-portraits. He left Keppel at Leghorn

and from there went on to Rome, where he stayed two years and thence by easy stages to Florence and to Venice.

Rome in the eighteenth century was the capital of the art-world and at the time of Reynolds' visit was full of travelling Englishmen; we have little direct evidence of the manner in which he employed himself there but he seems to have done comparatively little actual painting. The few pictures he did paint and which have survived are curious: they are a series of caricatures, painted obviously in imitation of the manner of Patch, of travelling noblemen—he even went so far as to do a sort of light-hearted burlesque of *The School of Athens*, made up of dozens of such figures. It was not long, however, before he realized how harmful to a portrait painter a reputation for clever caricature might be, and in after life he was much ashamed of these works and repeatedly sought to buy them back. Meanwhile, they paid for his stay, and we may suppose that, with Keppel's introduction behind him, he went about with these young men and shared in their dissipations.

His note-books are full of the most interesting comments and prove how closely he studied the works of Michelangelo, Raphael and the Carracci. It seems strange to us that he appears to regard Lodovico Carracci as the almost perfect artist for a young painter to model himself on (he repeats this later in the second of his Discourses), though he had no doubt, even at that age, that Michelangelo was the greatest of all painters. Some of these note-books are preserved in the British Museum, others belong to Mrs. Reynolds Gwatkin. But, although he spent so much of his time studying these great frescoes—and it was to fresco-painting that he was primarily attracted, he also did some quick copies; and it is here—on what he chose to copy—that we get perhaps the first hint of the duality of his nature: for example there is a note showing that he devoted two days to a copy of Titian, one afternoon to Rubens and a day to a Rembrandt self-portrait. Some critics incline to date Reynolds' self-portrait (Figure 2) as being painted *after* rather than *before* his Italian visit and if this were right may it not be the influence of Rembrandt rather than Gandy which it discloses?

That Reynolds, although much overawed by the Roman Masters—and oppressed as he always remained by the weight of cultivated opinion—was able to understand the merits of other painting is clear from his note about the earlier fourteenth and fifteenth-century masters, then completely despised and unappreciated. He writes: ' . . . The old Gothic masters as we call them, deserve the attention of the student much more than later artists; *simplicity* and *truth* being oftener found in the old masters which preceded the great age of painting than it ever was in that age, and certainly much less since'.

After leaving Florence he went on by way of Bologna, Modena, Parma, Mantua and Ferrara to Venice. At Parma he was greatly impressed by Corregio. 'This picture of *The Holy Family and St. Jerome*', he writes in his note-book, 'gave me as great pleasure as I have ever received from looking at any picture'. In Venice, though he struggled hard to convince himself that the excellence of the Venetians was of a lower order than that of Roman and Florentine painters, he found what, if unconsciously, he was really seeking, though even here he

concentrated his attention on those painters held then in the highest repute; fortunately, these included Veronese, Titian and Tintoretto (but not Bellini—he mentions him but once—or Giorgione or Carpaccio). In one of his note-books he describes his method of study: he says that he used to hold up a piece of paper in front of a picture and first shade in everything which was not in light, disregarding individual figures, and then superimpose in another flat layer of shading the middle tones and on top of this place the darks—in other words he distributed the main masses of light and shade in the way that they are in the painting. He says that he did this a great many times and he found in a very large number of masterpieces that the distribution was analogous, in the sense that he found that only roughly a quarter of the space of paper—which included both the highest and the supporting lights—was left white, and that of the remaining space about half was made up of half-tones and the rest of darks. He adds that in the case of Rembrandt he found the proportions were about one to eight, and that naturally the more the proportion of light to dark is reduced, even if the depths of tone are the same, the more brilliant the lights appear, but, that in his opinion, Rembrandt sometimes pays too high a price for this brilliance. (These notes are printed in full in Leslie and Taylor's 'Life'.)

Towards the end of 1752 he returned to England, staying on his way for a short time in Paris, where he found little to please him. His friend Lord Edgcumbe advised him to go at once to London, which he did, setting up first in Sir John Thornhill's old house in St. Martin's Lane. Again the Devonshire gentry supported him nobly and he did not lack sitters. At this time his prices were 12 guineas for a head, 24 for a half-length, and 48 for a full-length portrait. Soon he moved to more ample quarters at 5, Great Newport Street, and his success continuing he raised his prices to fifteen, thirty and sixty guineas—equal to those of Hudson at this time.

The picture which cemented his success in London was the splendid portrait, painted in 1753, of his friend, Keppel (Figure 5). In pursuing a French man-of-war Keppel had run his ship aground and it broke up. He was, of course, court-martialled but was acquitted with every honour and in the picture he is shown on the seashore directing operations for salvage. This was the first painting, or at any rate the most striking, in which Reynolds made what was, I think, his most notable contribution to British portrait painting. Instead of just painting his sitters against a background curtain or such like, in the way that obtained—with Hogarth as an occasional exception—up to then, he tried to show them at a dramatic moment of their career, or engaged in some way which he thought expressed their personalities. This was something quite new; the picture was a great success, and from now on his position was assured. This portrait is also an example of Reynolds' power to use his knowledge of other artists' work—the pose is that of the Appollo Belvedere reversed—and yet to make of it something undisputedly his own. In his Discourses he points out the great value that can be derived from the study of the masterpieces of the past, and how legitimate such borrowing is, provided, he most emphatically adds, that then you give new life to what you have taken by, 'painting it from nature'.

In 1753 Reynolds met Johnson—a meeting which proved to be another landmark in his career. He had been a deep admirer of Johnson since as a young man he chanced to take up *The Life of Savage* and, beginning to read it 'standing with his arm leaning against a chimney-piece' was unable to put it down till he reached the end, by which time his arm had become 'totally benumbed'. The actual meeting took place, according to Boswell, in the house of some ladies called the Misses Cotterell. These ladies were lamenting the death of a friend to whom they were under great obligation and Reynolds observed, 'You have, however, the comfort of being relieved from the burden of gratitude!' The ladies were much shocked, but Johnson was delighted and defended Reynolds for his independence of mind and lack of cant—and also, I suspect, because he thought it, though untimely, a witty saying. Afterwards, they went to supper together, and the friendship thus begun grew in intimacy and was only broken by Johnson's death.

Most of his sitters' books have been preserved. They make extremely interesting reading and indicate the startling nature of his success. In 1755 for example—two years after his setting up in London—he had 120 sitters, in 1757, 184, including one dog which is separately booked, the number of actual booked *sittings* being 677; in 1758 the number of sitters is 150. In spite of this prodigious output some of his finest portraits were painted at this period: as for example *The Countess of Albermarle*, 1757–59, in the National Gallery and *Nellie O'Brien*, 1760, in the Wallace Collection. Of course, Reynolds like all painters of his time (with the exception of Gainsborough) used 'drapery men': the Italian, Marchi, he brought back with him from Italy, and as he grew more successful the number of his assistants increased—but Reynolds seems, more than most of his contemporaries, to have been able to imbue them with much of his own spirit.

In 1760 he moved to 47, Leicester Square, or Leicester Fields as it was then called, where he lived for the rest of his life. He paid £1,650 for the 47-year lease of this house and spent £1,500 on it. He had raised his prices again to twenty guineas for a head, fifty guineas for a half-length and a hundred guineas for a full-length portrait. His painting room at Leicester Fields was surprisingly small. Northcott says it was octagonal, about twenty feet long by sixteen feet wide and that the window, which was half the size of an ordinary drawing-room window was nine feet four inches from the ground. His palette was not a thumb-hole palette, such as most people use, but was made with a handle (some of his palettes are preserved at Burlington House). His brushes, or pencils as they were then called, had very long handles, 19 inches in length. The great expense of this move exhausted most of his savings, but it was fully justified for before long he was reputed to be making about £6,000 a year.

Soon he set up a 'chariot'—it was very fine and had beautiful panels, painted by Catton (who subsequently became a member of the Royal Academy), and carved and gilded wheels. Reynolds himself had not much time, by daylight at any rate, to drive about in it, but Miss Reynolds used to be sent out in it. She objected very much to this and said that she thought it was much too grand, but Reynolds replied, 'Would you have me go around in an apothecary's rumble?'

It may be that Reynolds was well aware that this turn-out—the coachman and footman had silver braid all over the front of their coats—would impress people by making it clear how well he was doing and add still further to his prosperity. But in many ways this display seems extremely out of character when we remember his unpretentious brown or dull black coat, and unostentatious ways. I have wondered if the explanation is not a simple one—that needing a carriage and seeing such a beauty he just could not resist buying it and having it re-decorated.

I have said earlier, with reference to his portrait of Keppel, that Reynolds aimed at trying not only to paint his sitter in appropriate surroundings but at a moment which he felt expressed most clearly some dominant trait of character, and that he sought by thus, as it were, dramatizing a chosen moment to bridge in some sort the chasm he thought to exist between 'mere portraiture' and the 'higher' art of 'history' painting. Beautiful examples of his success in this are: *Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire*, dandling her crowing child, 1786 (Figure 7), his swaggering picture of *Captain Hamilton*, 1746 (which I have above referred to (Figure 3)) or, perhaps best of all, the superb *Lord Heathfield*, 1788 (now in the Tate Gallery), whose glorious defence of Gibraltar is so simply yet so dramatically suggested by his gesture with the key. It would be easy to cite others. Sometimes in his search for novelty, and in his wish to avoid repetition he is extremely daring: in his portrait of *Viscount Sydney and Col. Dyke Acland, The Archers*, 1770 (Figure 4), the two young men are painted in the glade of a wood, the one drawn back the other darting forward, both about to discharge their arrows at some quarry which we feel is only just outside the picture. If one may find such a composition a little restless the extraordinary courage and invention he displays—for this was a *commissioned portrait*—is not to-day sufficiently applauded. Who, for example, receiving a commission to paint, say, the chairman of a great bank or a famous Cabinet Minister, would dare—however notoriously addicted to such pastimes—to show the one ending a tremendous 'swing' while his awed caddie with hand-shaded eye watches the ball soaring into the distant sky; or the other with legs negligently crossed cutting some splendid figure on the ice? Or, should he be rash enough to do so, how likely would he be to succeed!

In 1768 the Royal Academy was founded and Reynolds was elected its first President. In 1769 he was knighted. He was now, at the age of 46, the acknowledged head of his profession and he set out both by his practice and by the precept stated in the famous series of 15 Discourses delivered—with but an occasional break—at the annual prize-giving at the Royal Academy, to try to realize the second of his objects—that of raising the status of the painter to equal that of practitioners of the other liberal arts and of laying the foundations of an 'English School of Painting', which would rank as a 'European Style'.

This attempt led to an increased number of his more formal and—to our taste—less satisfactory pictures. Great ladies were shown 'sacrificing to the Graces', as Hope Nursing Love, and so forth. Though we may deplore some of these 'public face' pictures, and find both their design and characterization



76 × 63 cm

[Cottonian Collection ; by courtesy of the
City Museum and Art Gallery, Plymouth]

FIGURE 1. *The Rev. Samuel Reynolds*, ca. 1746



63 × 74 cm

[By courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery]

FIGURE 2. *Joshua Reynolds*, 1753/54 (?)



127 × 110 cm
(By courtesy of His Grace the Duke of Abercorn)
FIGURE 3. *Captain the Honble John Hamilton*, 1746



74 × 62 cm
(By courtesy of Lord Hillington)
FIGURE 4. *Mrs. Abington as Miss Prue in 'Love for Love'*, R.A. 1771



233 x 146 cm

[By courtesy of the Trustees of the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich]

LEFT. FIGURE 5.
The Honble Augustus
(later Viscount) Keppel,
1753/54



237 x 146 cm

[Blakeslee Sale, New York, 1915]

RIGHT. FIGURE 6.
Annabella, Lady Blake,
as 'Juno receiving the
cestus from Venus',
R.A. 1769



111 x 142 cm

[By courtesy of the Trustees of the Chatsworth Settlement

FIGURE 7. *Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire, and her daughter, Georgiana, later Countess of Carlisle*. R.A. 1786



236 x 180 cm

[By courtesy of the Honble Mrs. Mervyn Herbert

FIGURE 8. *Thomas, Viscount Sydney, and Col. John Dyke Acland, 'The Archers'*. R.A. 1770

insipid, this is by no means always the case; for example, in such a picture as *Anabella, Lady Blake as 'Juno receiving the Cestus from Venus'* (Figure 6), in spite of—perhaps because of—the very consistency of the artifice he has made a really magnificent design and is a surprising forerunner of David and Ingres. Also I think one must admit the extraordinary courage of attempting, and publicly exhibiting, portraits done with this end in view.

But such a painting as *Mrs. Abington as Miss Prue in 'Love for Love'*, 1771 (Figure 4) illustrates clearly the other, the intimate strain in Reynolds' work. Indeed, the variety in style of his pictures is as great as the range of his sitters. He literally painted everybody. His painting room is common ground. The most ferocious political opponents follow each other and bishops and courtesans have sittings on the same day.

I mentioned earlier his meeting with Johnson and this was followed by other friendships: with Goldsmith, Burke, Garrick, Boswell and the amusing and conversationally brilliant men of fashion such as Topham Beauclerc and Bennett Langton. In 1764 at the suggestion of Reynolds, the 'Literary Club' was founded, its object 'to give Johnson unlimited opportunity to talk.'

He was, with one or two exceptions, on very good terms with his fellow painters, but he was not really intimate with them and his close friends were men eminent in other ways. His character is enigmatic. He was obviously of an exceptional blandness and evenness of temperament. There were some who saw this as resulting from indifference while others thought it came from sheer goodness and kindness. The latter is certainly the view you get from reading Leslie and Taylor, whose 'Life', published in 1865, is still much the best biography of Reynolds—though it must be remembered that it was in part written as an answer to Alan Cunningham's criticisms. Sir Walter Armstrong—most hostile critic—writing in 1895—expressed the view that 'he was not an unqualified egoist. His judgment was so unbiased that his actions were those of a sympathetic man, although not, as a fact, dictated by sympathy'.

Whatever Reynolds' motives may have been, a number of small actions are recorded which make it easy to understand the esteem and affection in which he was held. For example, he bought a painting from the Academy for a hundred guineas, but at the request of Lord Carlisle readily relinquished his purchase—sending to the artist, however, the twenty guineas he had added to the price for the 'accommodation'. A boy, the son of a friend of Reynolds (a doctor of no special distinction), was most anxious, on his sixteenth birthday, to see his father. His father had a fever and his son was not allowed to see him. Seeing his disappointment, Reynolds said, 'Never mind, I will send you to him all the same', and he painted as a gift a delightful picture of the boy looking round a curtain which he despatched to the father.

That he was not—at any rate on all occasions—as some would have, subservient, is shown by a story about him reported by Boswell: they were disputing the virtue of wine drinking as an aid to conversation. Johnson was at his most tiresome—at this time he drank only tea, though sometimes as much as thirty cups at a sitting—and said, 'Boswell, Sir, is in a sounder position than you for

he argues for wine without the use of it', and when Reynolds protested, added: 'I will not argue with you any more, Sir, you are too far gone'. At which Reynolds said, 'I should indeed be so, Sir, had I made a remark such as you have just done!' Johnson, for the first and last time in his life, blushed, but said at once, 'Nay, nay, I did not mean to offend thee'. That he had the warmth and the almost saintly character of Johnson, nobody, I think, would claim. We cannot imagine Reynolds, like Johnson, when poor himself bringing down-and-outs into his house, or supporting for thirty years old ladies who must often have strained his patience as well as his purse, nor can we think of him if two rowdy young men came and slammed on his door at two o'clock in the morning—they were, in fact, Topham Beauclerc and Bennett Langton—calling out: 'Wait, wait, I will come down and frisk with you, you dogs!' I do not think Reynolds inspired love so much as affection, but the affections he roused he held for a lifetime.

His hospitality took an unexpected form. It might be thought that a man, very fastidious by nature, who moved continually in the highest circles, would have his own house elegantly ordered. This was not so. It was a free for all. Places would be laid for about six people, whom he had asked to dinner, but by the time he had got home he would have asked another half-a-dozen; though there was plenty of food and drink, it had to be scrambled for; often there were not enough knives and forks, and a shortage of glasses. Nevertheless, and in spite of the handicap his deafness must have caused, invitations were eagerly sought.

The series of 15 Discourses (and of which more will be said later) which Reynolds delivered to the students of the Royal Academy, though much the most famous of his writings—they were written and 'read', and were subsequently published—are not the only ones.

In 1759 he contributed three 'letters' to Johnson's *Idler*, and the first, particularly in view of his subsequent pronouncements, is of considerable interest. Like Hogarth before him, he is moved to an outburst against the shallow and pretentious. The great difference in temperament between Hogarth and Reynolds has obscured, for some critics, the similarity of the views they shared on many matters. For example Hogarth, in his *Analysis of Beauty*, says, genius is 'nothing but labour and diligence' while Reynolds' definition is 'a power acquired by long labour and study'. But, though the essential sentiment is often similar, how the wording of their views reveals the difference in their characters! In Hogarth's 'letter' which appeared in 1737 over the signature 'Britophil', he rages against

The iniquitous picture-jobbers who, to the prejudice of native effort, are glutting the market with the rubbish of the Roman art-factories . . . dismal dark subjects, neither entertaining nor ornamental, on which they scrawl the terrible cramp names of some Italian masters, and fix on us poor Englishmen the character of universal dupes.

Reynolds, in the *Idler*, first inveighs against

the kind of critic, still worse, who judges by narrow rules . . . for whatever part of an art can be executed or criticised by rules, that part is no longer the work of genius, which implies excellence out of the reach of rules.

(This view, and it recurs in his later writings, is borne out by the very haphazard

and technically experimental way in which to our surprise we find him executing his own paintings too often, alas, to the detriment of their permanency.)

He continues by attacking the 'connoisseur'

just returned from Italy, a connoisseur of course, and of course his mouth full of nothing but the Grace of Raffaele, the Purity of Domenichino, the Learning of Poussin, the air of Guido, the Greatness of Taste of the Carracci, and the Sublimity and Grand Contorno of Michelangelo; with all the rest of the cant of criticism. . . .

He then supposes 'his friend' before Raphael's cartoon of *St. Paul Preaching*:

what nobleness, what dignity there is in the figure of St. Paul! and yet, what an addition to that nobleness could Raffaele have given, had the art of contrast been known in his time.

It is the old cry of the painter—that only painters know anything about painting—'it is curious to observe' he continues, 'that at the same time that great admiration is pretended for a name of fixed reputation, objections are raised against those very qualities by which that great name was raised'. Is not this last often only too true today?

The first of the Discourses was delivered on 2nd January, 1769, in the year following the foundation of the Royal Academy and the remaining 14 (there were 15 in all) at, with few breaks, approximately yearly intervals till his valedictory Discourse on 10th December, 1790.

Much has been said and written about the disparity between Reynolds' precept—his recommendation of the grand style, the lofty poetic content and the virtue of generalization—and his practice as a portrait-painter. In examining this criticism the general state of cultivated opinion and the universally recognized 'authority' of the Roman Masters should be borne in mind, and also that till his time—if the great period of Romanesque and early Gothic art (neither understood nor appreciated then) is excepted—there was no 'school' of English painting recognized in or out of England.

Secondly, it should be remembered that Reynolds wished to raise—and in this he succeeded—the art of painting to the status of a liberal art and that he saw that this could be done only by advocating a reverence for antiquity and a scholarly approach.

Thirdly, that he was addressing himself to students. He considered that the Academy should not only instruct the student but should—there was no National Gallery then—contain examples of those 'authentic models' on which students should form their taste. He insists that from *young* (and the word is printed in Italics) students 'implicit obedience to the Rules of Art, as established by the practice of the great masters should be exacted'. He gives as a reason for this . . . 'he who sets out with doubting will find life finished before he becomes master of the rudiments'.

When Reynolds' views about 'rules'—which are quoted earlier—are remembered, it is clear that this is no narrow bigotry, whether or no we consider his views applicable to-day; moreover, he is careful to insist on the importance of 'exact' careful studies from the living model, and must we not admit that his

'elementary stage', which comprises 'a facility of drawing any object that presents itself, a tolerable readiness in the management of colours, and an acquaintance with the most simple and obvious rules of composition', would be a good deal beyond what most students to-day would be content to *leave* an art school with. 'Masterly dexterity' is to be repressed and students are to be told again and again, 'there is no easy method of becoming a good painter'.

He believed that having passed this stage the student should, by his observation and study of the works of great masters, be laying up and storing in his mind material for his art. He is 'to consider the art itself as his master,' he is 'to amass a stock of ideas to be combined and varied as occasion may require', and by 'ideas' he meant not only ideas directly concerned with painting but poetical and philosophical ideas which, in his view, should form the subject matter of great painting.

It is only in the third and last stage that the student should be emancipated from any authority, though here—and it indicates the subtlety of his mind—he emphasizes that it requires the most attentive survey 'to discriminate perfections that are incompatible with each other'. This idea appears also ten years earlier in the letter to the *Idler*, part of which has been quoted. How often to-day do we not observe in the turgidity of some contemporary painting just the kind of artistic indigestion which he so repeatedly warns us to beware of?

Again and again he asserts that the object of art is to 'capture the imagination' by the 'grandeur of ideas' rather than 'amusing mankind by minute neatness of imitations'.

He advances what to many may appear the strange-seeming theory that there is an 'ideal nature' free of the 'blemishes' of individual specimens, and it is this that it is the artist's business to discover. He never wearies of supporting this theory with reference to the ancient, particularly the Greek, masters.

We now come to the most widely known—and the most criticized—of his theories: his conviction that the highest form of painting is 'history painting'—the painting of subjects of 'universal concern' such as 'early education' and the 'usual course of reading' has made familiar, as he maintained, without vulgarizing them the great events of Greek and Roman history, scripture and the great works of literature; and he holds up Raphael and Michelangelo and—to us more surprisingly—the masters of the Bolognese school (of whom Ludovico Carracci is an especial favourite) as examples to be followed.

Great as is his understanding of the Venetians—of Titian, Tintoretto and Veronese—he places them in the lower category of 'ornamental' painting. Their splendour of style he does not deny—indeed to us they seem to be the masters on which Reynolds in fact founded his own style—but they show 'more copiousness than choice and more luxuriance than judgment'.

Here we see, very clearly, his personal dilemma. He is torn between his natural feeling for 'character' and affinity to the great Venetians and his conviction that 'history painting' (and, as he considered, the necessary generalization it required) was the highest form of art. He attempted in his 'public manner'

(particularly in the 1770-1780 decade) to combine these divergent elements—often, alas, as in his portrait of Lady Bunbury with disastrous results; but it has been too readily assumed that this attempt, unsympathetically as we view it to-day, was all loss. For surely it is just his ability—as in his portraits of Dr. Johnson and of Lord Heathfield (both in the National Gallery) to omit the unessential and to combine character, largeness of conception, dramatic interest and that most rare of qualities in English painting, weight, which gives to Reynolds' best work its unique distinction. He was, moreover, able to do this and to unite it with the most enchanting prettiness, of which perhaps the finest example is the lovely *Lady Frances Finch*, recently on view in London. Pictures such as these could not have been painted at that date, at any rate, without the discipline that he imposed on himself in this way.

His recommendation to students to store their mind with images 'to be combined as occasion requires' has already been referred to, and much of his variousness—'Damn him', as Gainsborough remarked 'how various he is'—must be attributed to his following this precept. We may deplore such works as *Miss Morris as Hope Nursing Love*, with its insipid over-(or rather under-) tones of Corregio, but in the Keppel by the sea shore (Figure 5) the debt to the Apollo Belvedere is handsomely repaid.

His fourteenth Discourse delivered in 1788 is largely devoted to an appreciation of Gainsborough who had recently died. It is a most generous and understanding tribute to his great rival.

In his last Discourse, the fifteenth, delivered in 1790, he speaks as an old man. He is partially blind; he has resigned, but subsequently resumed, the Presidency. At the beginning he states—as an apology for 'any want of elegance'

that I am convinced that one short essay written by a painter will contribute more to advance the theory of our art, than a thousand volumes such as we sometimes see; the purpose of which appear to be rather to display the refinement of the Author's own conception of impossible practice, than to convey useful knowledge or instruction of any kind whatsoever. An Artist knows what is, and what is not, within the province of his art to perform; and is not likely to be forever teasing the poor Student with the beauties of mixed passions, or to perplex him with an imaginary union of excellencies incompatible with each other.

He restates the intention of his previous Discourses and his wish that students may find profit in them and be encouraged to study the work of the great artists of the past. He speaks then with great eloquence of Michelangelo:

I have taken another course, one more suited to my abilities, and to the taste of the times in which I live. Yet, however unequal I feel myself to that attempt, were I now to begin the world again, I would tread in the steps of that great master: to kiss the hem of his garment, to catch the slightest of his perfections, would be glory and distinction enough for an ambitious man. I feel a self-congratulation in knowing myself capable of such intentions as he intended to excite. I reflect, not without vanity, that these Discourses bear testimony of my admiration of that truly divine man; and I should desire that the last words which I should pronounce in this Academy, and from this place, might be the name of—MICHELANGELO.

He ceased and, as he stepped from the rostrum, Burke went up to him, took him by the hand and said (the lines are from *Paradise Lost*):

The Angel ended, and in Adam's ear
So charming left his voice, that he a while
Thought him still speaking, still stood fix'd to hear.

Two years later on Thursday, 23rd February, 1792, he died at Leicester Fields in his sixty-ninth year.

THE CHAIRMAN: Those who own a portrait of Sir Joshua Reynolds are to be envied; among the many gifted artists of his day he was the most distinguished. To-day, we have been privileged to listen to an address by an artist who is a portrait painter and one who knows the value of study.

Sir Joshua Reynolds began by teaching himself and then, as he gained experience, intensified his study of the minds of the great masters. I have a book in my possession, which belonged to Sir Joshua, giving illustrations of all the figures and vases of Versailles; it is a very fine volume indeed! It contains many suggestions for the poses you have seen on the slides to-day. Sir Joshua believed in the value of precepts. With fellow Academicians, Nollekens, who collected prints showing the heads of celebrities, used to examine these prints before his sitters arrived. Having predetermined the pose he would say, 'My Lord, like this please!' Reynolds certainly taught us style and he directed our thoughts to composition. 'Why, the fellow is so damned various!' said Gainsborough, referring to his variety and his compositions in which he recast as he thought fit. For this reason those canvases of his which we adore have an Olympian quality, they belong to their period. Sir Joshua possessed a very fine library, and so did Sir William Chambers, whose portrait by Reynolds is at Burlington House.

It was due to those two that the Royal Academy was founded. We know that there was a lot of bickering beforehand, but the Academy has survived since 1768 and now it is more vigorous than ever. To-day we are fast becoming a nation of art-lovers; perhaps we shall lead all Europe as we did in the eighteenth century. Art proceeds, not in a direct line but by continual return. Its truest exponents actually go back in order to advance. In this they are at one with nature. Nature returns and that is why there is always the hope of a fresh spring. In art there has been no advance ever—only return. All the great artists knew that and Reynolds was one of the foremost to appreciate this theory. Be fearless! Have the courage to say what you think! Your commonsense will guide you, and a lecture like this will sustain you and you will go forth saying, 'We have listened to a lecture about Reynolds. We will now examine his work! We know as much as one of the leading lecturers can tell us'. That knowledge will be applied to other works. His discourses are models of literary style; his aphorisms are as trite as those of Michelangelo or Leonardo da Vinci. Sir Joshua Reynolds was the Apostolic descendant of the great painters of the Baroque, imparting to his work that voluptuous fullness and distinction which we associate with the great masters of the Renaissance. He studied and he borrowed without cessation. His theory was 'He who borrows an idea and so accommodates it to his own work that it makes part of it with no seam or join appearing, can hardly be charged with plagiarism'. Or again, 'Invention is one of the greatest works of genius; but it is by being conversant with the inventions of others that we learn to invent; as by reading the thoughts of others we learn to think'. I strongly recommend similar views to youthful artist sculptors and architects to-day. I do this because I feel sure that many will respond.

When we think of Reynolds' portrait of Nelly O'Brien, 1763, now in the Wallace Collection, we record the great artist at the very top of his powers. But it was the

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THE LIFE AND WORKS OF SIR JOSHUA REYNOLDS

influence he exercised on all his contemporaries, and even his successors, that testifies to his strength of character and objectivity of purpose.

Occupying the Presidential chair as an architect gives me many opportunities to view his work for the Royal Academy, particularly the schools which he personally organized and lectured to.

It is difficult to sum up all that has been so admirably described by our lecturer this afternoon. In fact, I feel somewhat diffident about even venturing the details I have done, for the lecturer is far more competent than myself to deal with our great founder of the foremost portrait painters of the reign of George III.

A vote of thanks to the Lecturer was carried with acclamation, and the meeting then ended.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The help given by Professor E. K. Waterhouse in kindly lending photographs of portraits which appeared in his book on *Reynolds* is gratefully acknowledged.—[ED.]

GENERAL NOTES

SINGAPORE POLYTECHNIC

The projected building of the Singapore Polytechnic, several departments of which are expected to be in operation within two or three years, creates the need for considerable amounts of equipment. The Principal-elect, Mr. D. J. Williams, a Fellow of the Society, would therefore find it of great help if the following were sent to him:

Detailed catalogues, giving export prices and deliveries, when possible, from suppliers and manufacturers of text-books, stationery, college furniture, apparatus, machinery, catering equipment, visual aids, office equipment and educational material.

Membership or examination regulations, and syllabuses, or both, of the chief professional institutions and examining bodies, together with training scheme pamphlets, specimen journals and other available materials.

For the library, which will probably act as a Technical Reference Library for professional and technological purposes in the Colony, specimens of technical and commercial literature (with back numbers if possible), research pamphlets, machinery manuals, house magazines, wall charts and reference materials of all kinds.

Letters and parcels should be addressed to Mr. D. J. Williams at the Singapore Polytechnic, P.O. Box 2023, Singapore. Firms (or their agents) and organizations are requested to place the college on their permanent mailing lists when appropriate. Second class air mail should be used, or ordinary mail by sea for bulky materials.

OBITUARY

SIR WILLIAM PATERSON

We record with regret the death of Sir William Paterson, M.I.Mech.E., designer of the Anderson shelter, who died on 10th August, at the age of 82.

William Paterson was trained in Edinburgh as an engineer: he specialized in water purification from the start of his career and in 1902 formed his own company, the Paterson Engineering Company, in this connection. The subsequent developments in this field of engineering have followed in the main the lines indicated by his many investigations and inventions.

At the request of the then Home Secretary and Minister of Home Security, Sir William Paterson designed, in 1939, the well-known 'Anderson' air-raid shelter, which was a mass-produced protection against blast and flying debris; he presented the patent to the nation.

He received his knighthood in 1944 and since then added to his many distinctions honorary membership of the Institution of Water Engineers and of the Royal Society of Health, honorary fellowship of the Heriot Watt College, and life membership of the American Water Works Association. He retired from the Chairmanship of his company early this year.

Sir William was elected a Fellow of the Society in 1938.

SHORT NOTES ON BOOKS

THE SCOPE OF TOTAL ARCHITECTURE. *By Walter Gropius, Allen & Unwin, 1956. 15s*

In a collection of articles and lectures written in the main between the years 1937 and 1952, when Mr. Gropius was Chairman of the Department of Architecture at Harvard University, the author presents his views on architecture and its function in society. The book is fully illustrated.

THE MODERN CHURCH. *By Edward D. Mills. Architectural Press, 1956. 21s*

Practical aspects of modern church building are in this book considered by a practising church architect. The author has chosen many examples from different parts of the world, which are copiously illustrated by photographs and diagrams. There are three appendices, and a bibliography.

EARLY ITALIAN PAINTING, 1250-1500. *By F. M. Godfrey. Tiranti, 1956. 21s*

A guide to Italian art from the mid-thirteenth to the end of the fifteenth century is provided by this book, which is intended primarily for the younger student. It contains many black and white illustrations of paintings, with notes upon them, together with biographical data on the artists.

FROM THE JOURNAL OF 1856

VOLUME IV. 5th September, 1856

A RAILROAD HOTEL CAR

A car lately put on the Illinois Central Railroad contains six state rooms, each room having two seats with cushioned backs, large enough for a person to lie on. The backs of the seats are hung with hinges at the upper edge, so that they may be turned up at pleasure, thus forming two single berths, one over the other, where persons may sleep with comfort. In one end of the car is a small wash room. On the opposite side of the car from the state rooms is a row of seats, with revolving backs, similar to barbers' chairs, so arranged that the occupant may sit straight, or recline in an easy attitude, at pleasure. There are other cars on the same road which have each two or three similar staterooms.

It is suggested that to this car there should be added the means of supplying meals at moderate prices, at all hours, and that this would make railroad travelling positively perfect. It would be a good plan on all railroads more than a hundred miles long, to have a special car where refreshments could be obtained at reasonable prices. The houses of refreshment at railroad stations, where passengers are compelled to run 'when the bell rings' to the great danger of their limbs, and the loss of many sixpences, ought to be swept away to make room for some better system, whatever that may be.